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THE BOYS OF THE OLD GLEE CLUB

JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY

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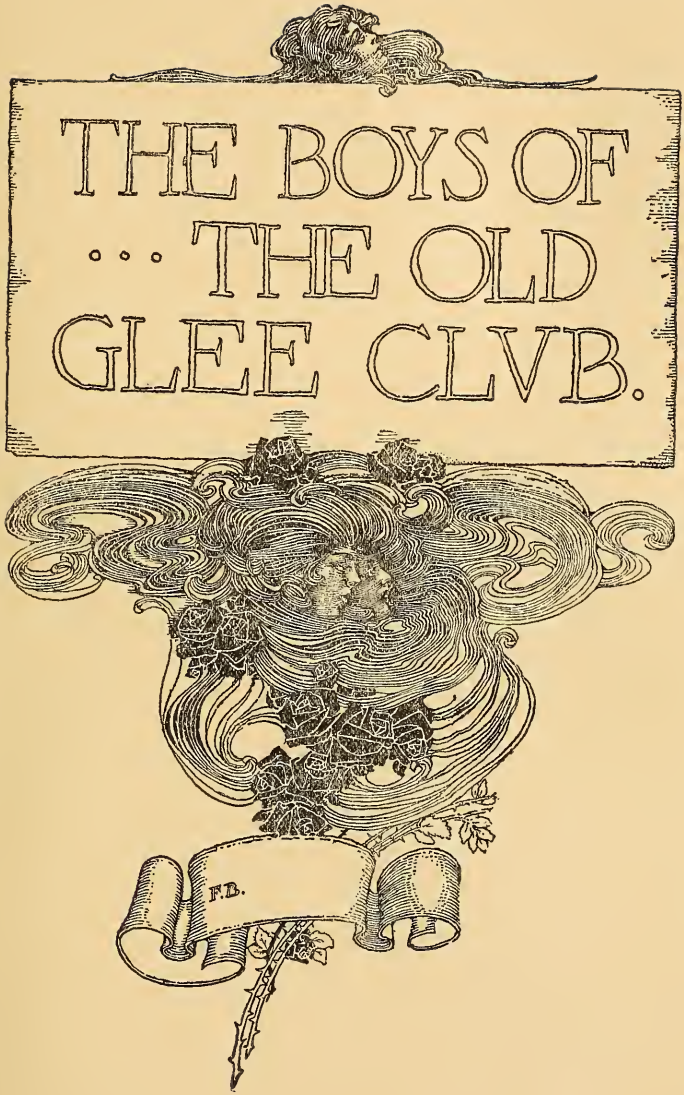
THE BOYS OF
... THE OLD
GLEE CLUB.
F.B.

THE BOYS OF THE OLD GLEE CLUB

By JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY

INDIANAPOLIS
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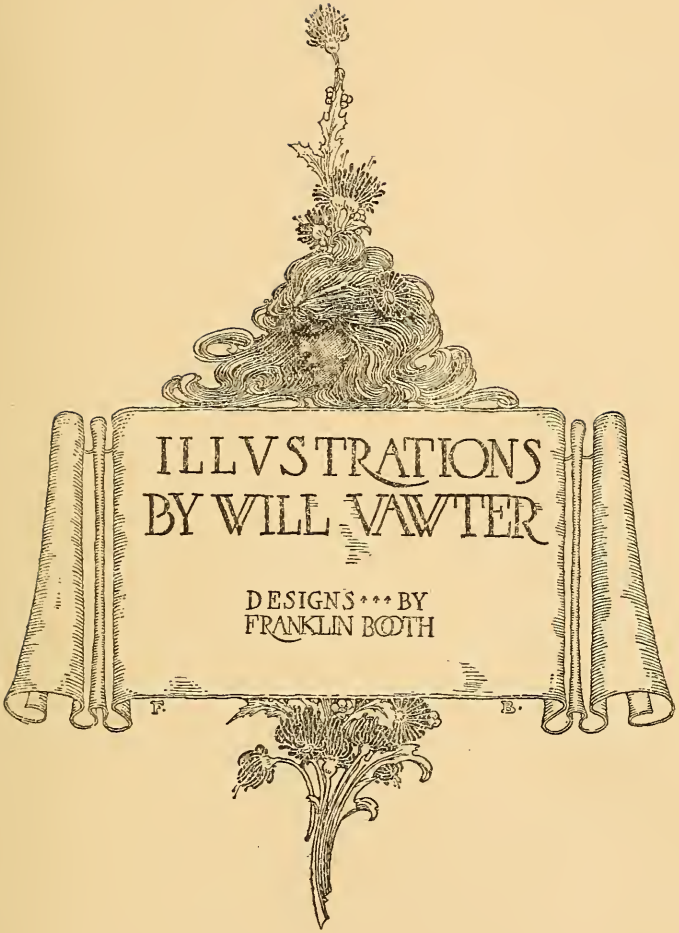
To
NEWTON·BOOTH·TARKINGTON


ILLVSTRATIONS
BY WILL VAWTER
DESIGNS BY
FRANKLIN BOOTH
F.
B.

LIST OF ILLVSTRATIONS

Then Th' Old Glee
Club marched out to victory!—*Frontispiece*

Politics was runnin' high

Burgess Brown's friends all 'low
He is 'most as lively now

Prompt on time to vote at home!

Er sometimes jest set and talk
'Bout old times back here—

He says, "Course I'm *bald* a bit"

LIST OF ILLVSTRATIONS

—ever' one—
Loved to love Will Tarkington!

And a *Brass,* and *Sheepskin* Band

Heerd high 'bove the hoarsest roar
O' any storm on sea er shore!

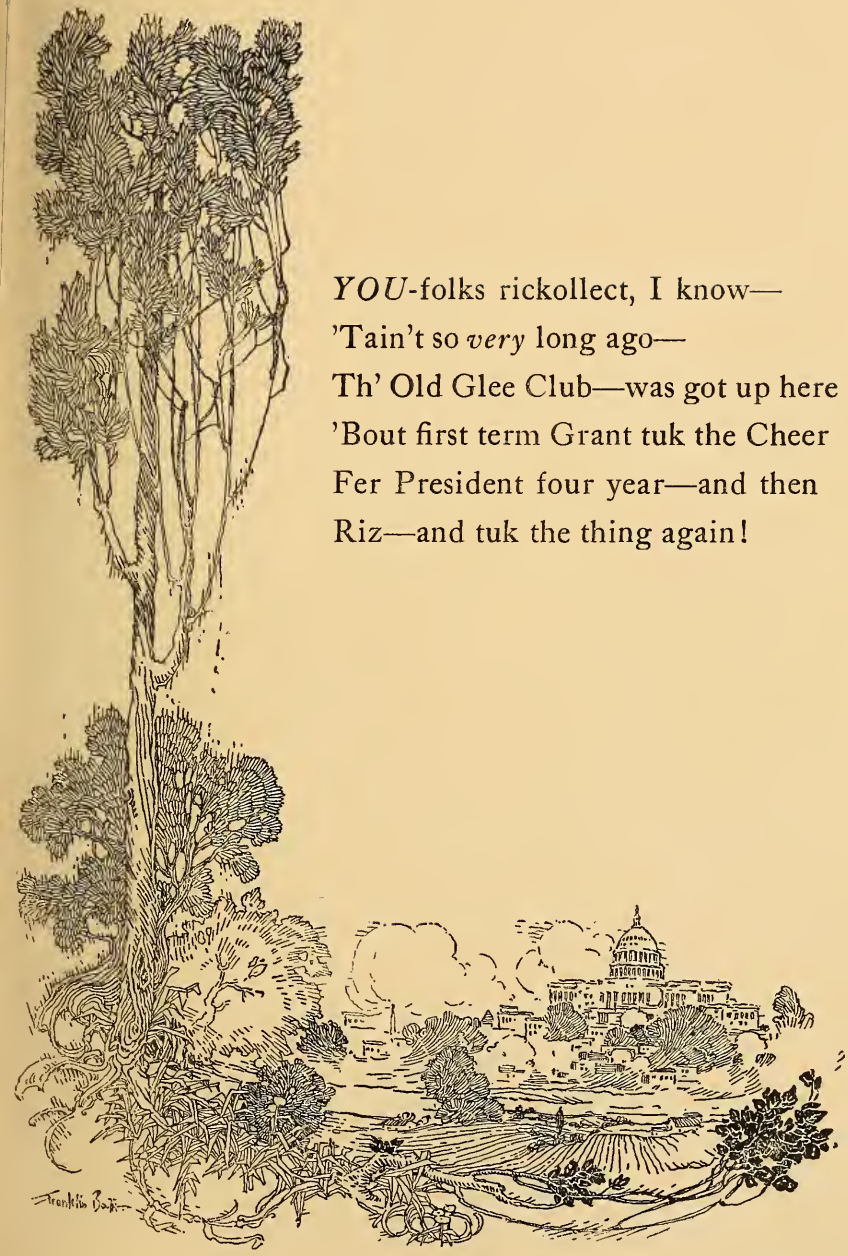
Time's be'n clockin' on, you know!

Campaign work and jubilees
To wake up the primaries

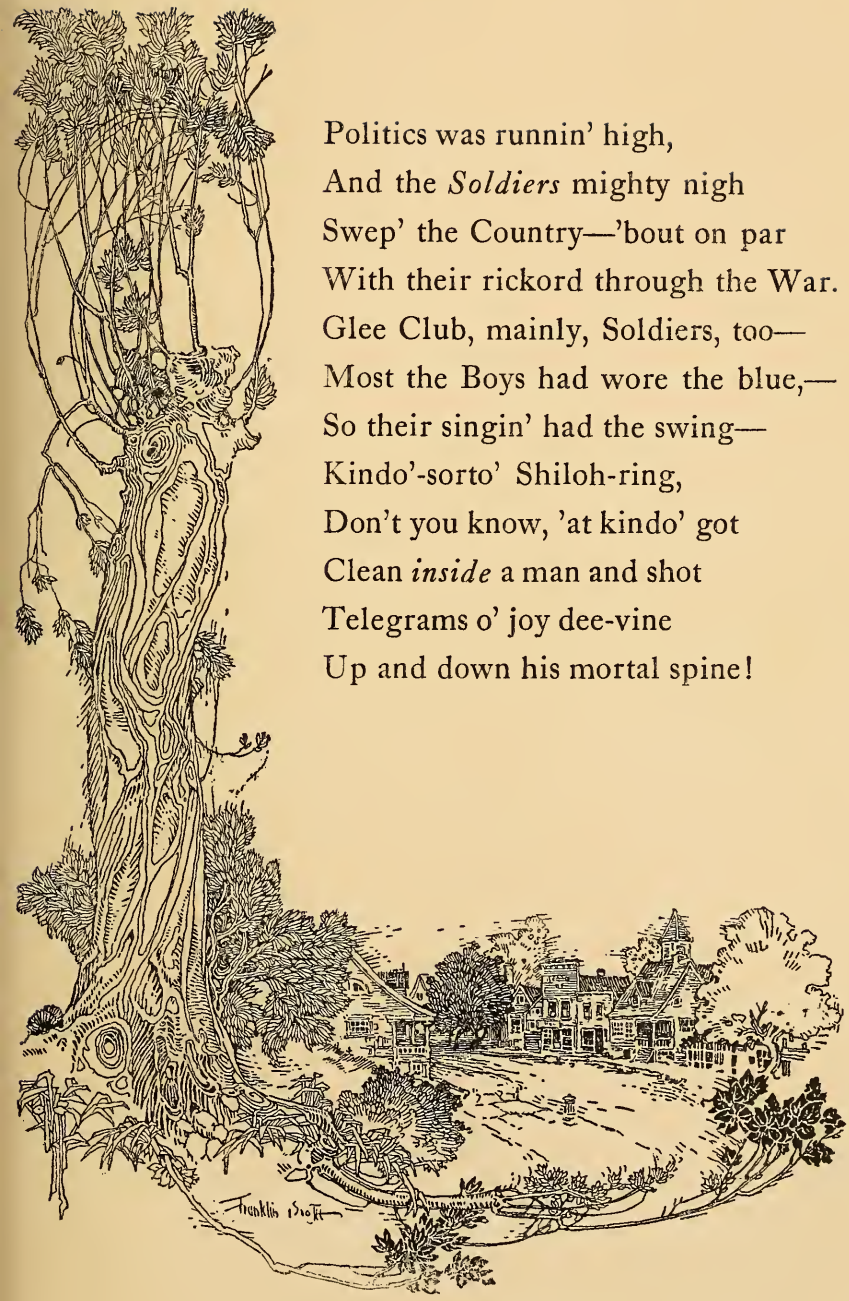
Mahlon Butler he come past
My shop

"—Thank God, they're singing yet!"

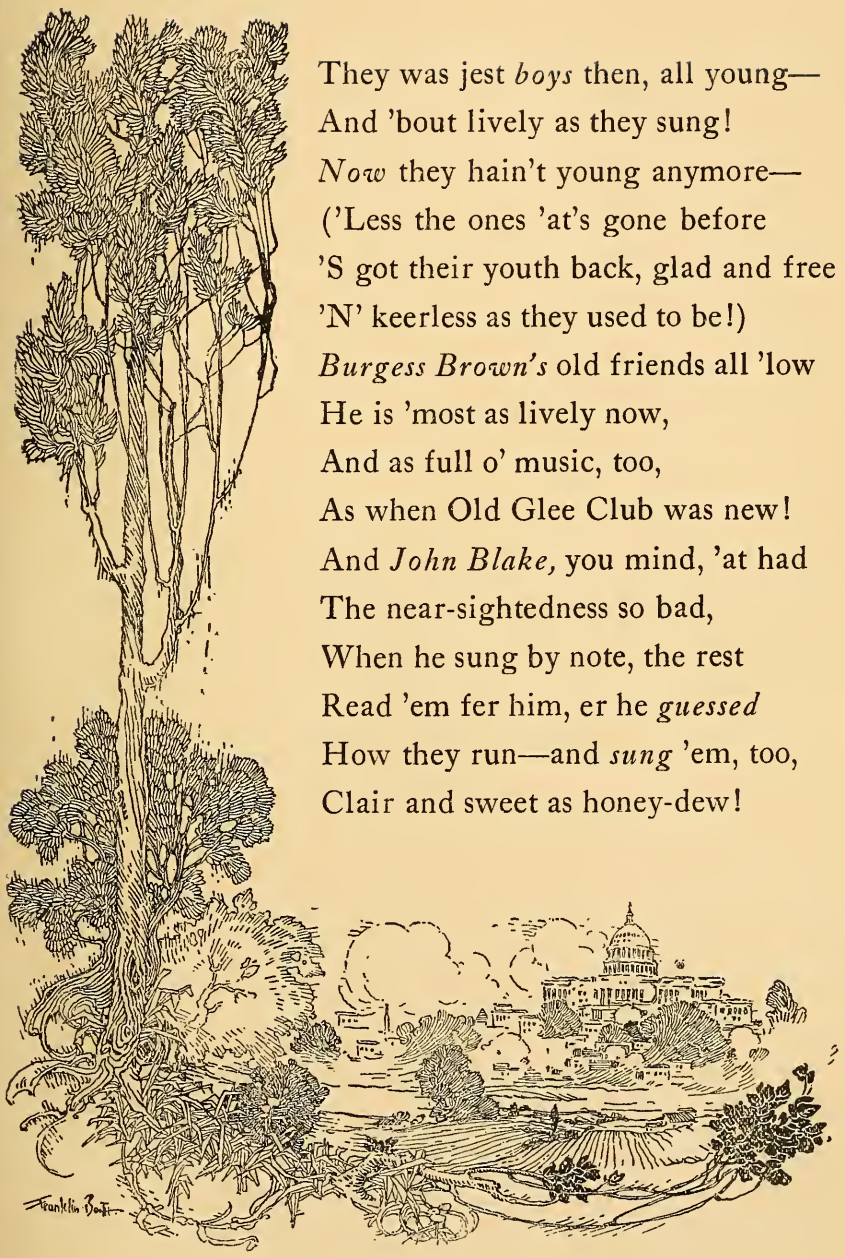
THE BOYS OF ... THE OLD GLEE CLUB.



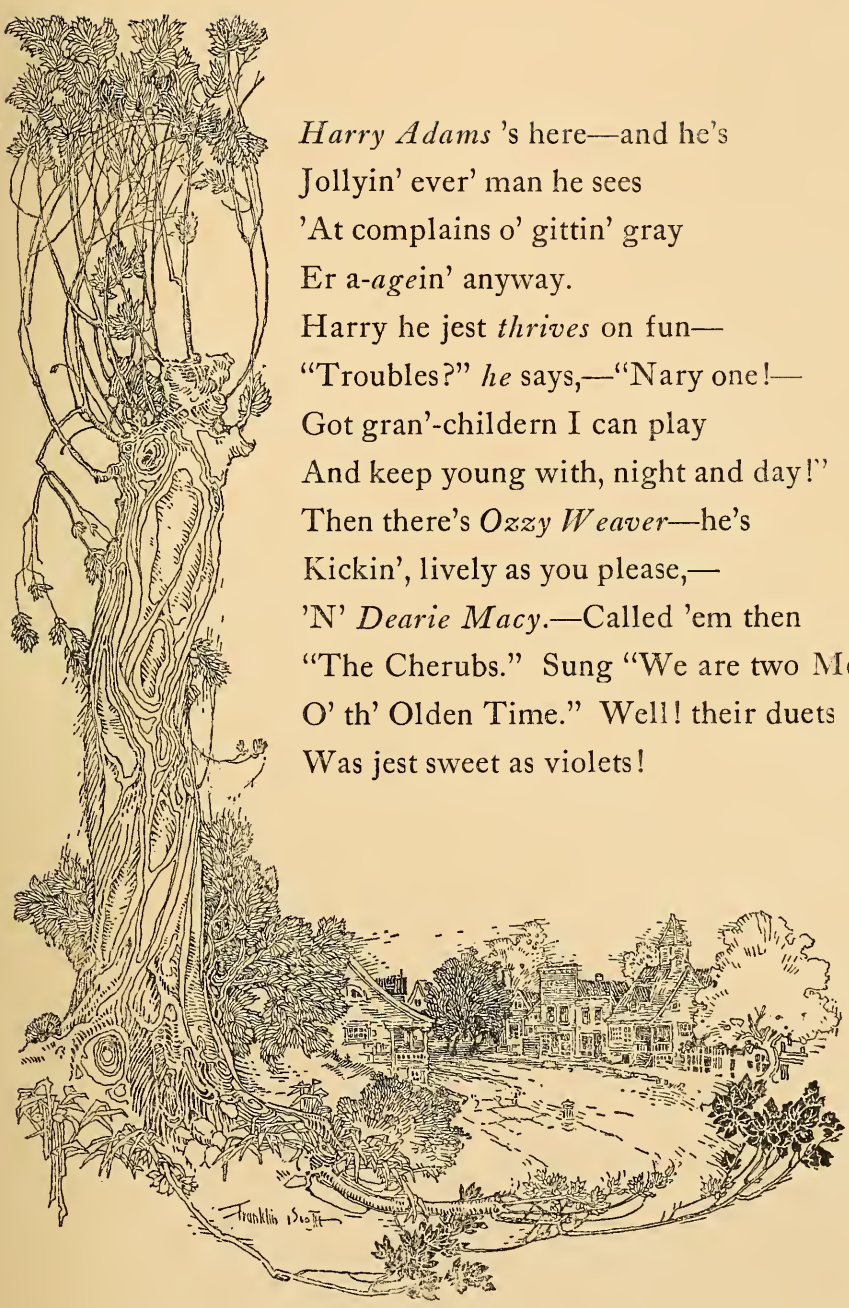
YOU-folks rickollect, I know—
'Tain't so *very* long ago—
Th' Old Glee Club—was got up here
'Bout first term Grant tuk the Cheer
Fer President four year—and then
Riz—and tuk the thing again!



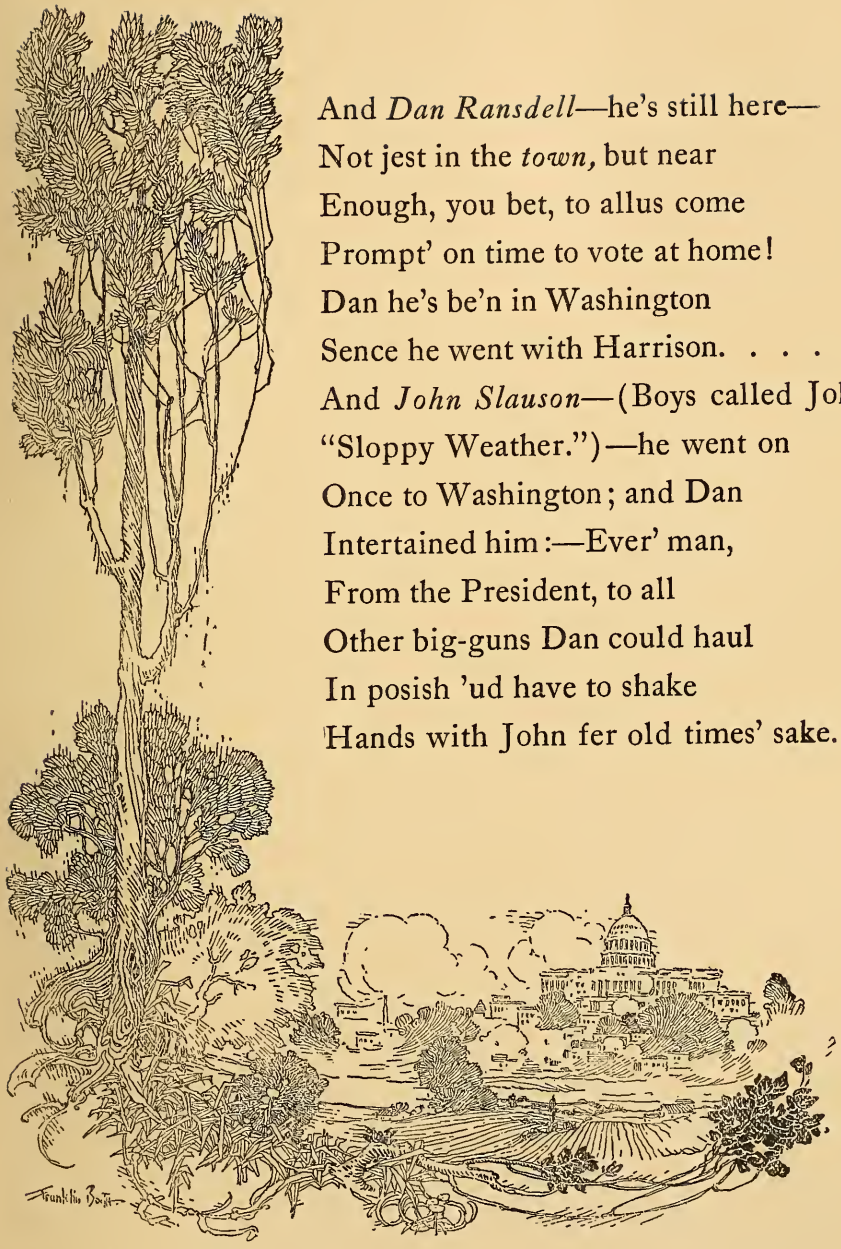
Politics was runnin' high,
And the *Soldiers* mighty nigh
Swep' the Country—'bout on par
With their rickord through the War.
Glee Club, mainly, Soldiers, too—
Most the Boys had wore the blue,—
So their singin' had the swing—
Kindo'-sorto' Shiloh-ring,
Don't you know, 'at kindo' got
Clean *inside* a man and shot
Telegrams o' joy dee-vine
Up and down his mortal spine!



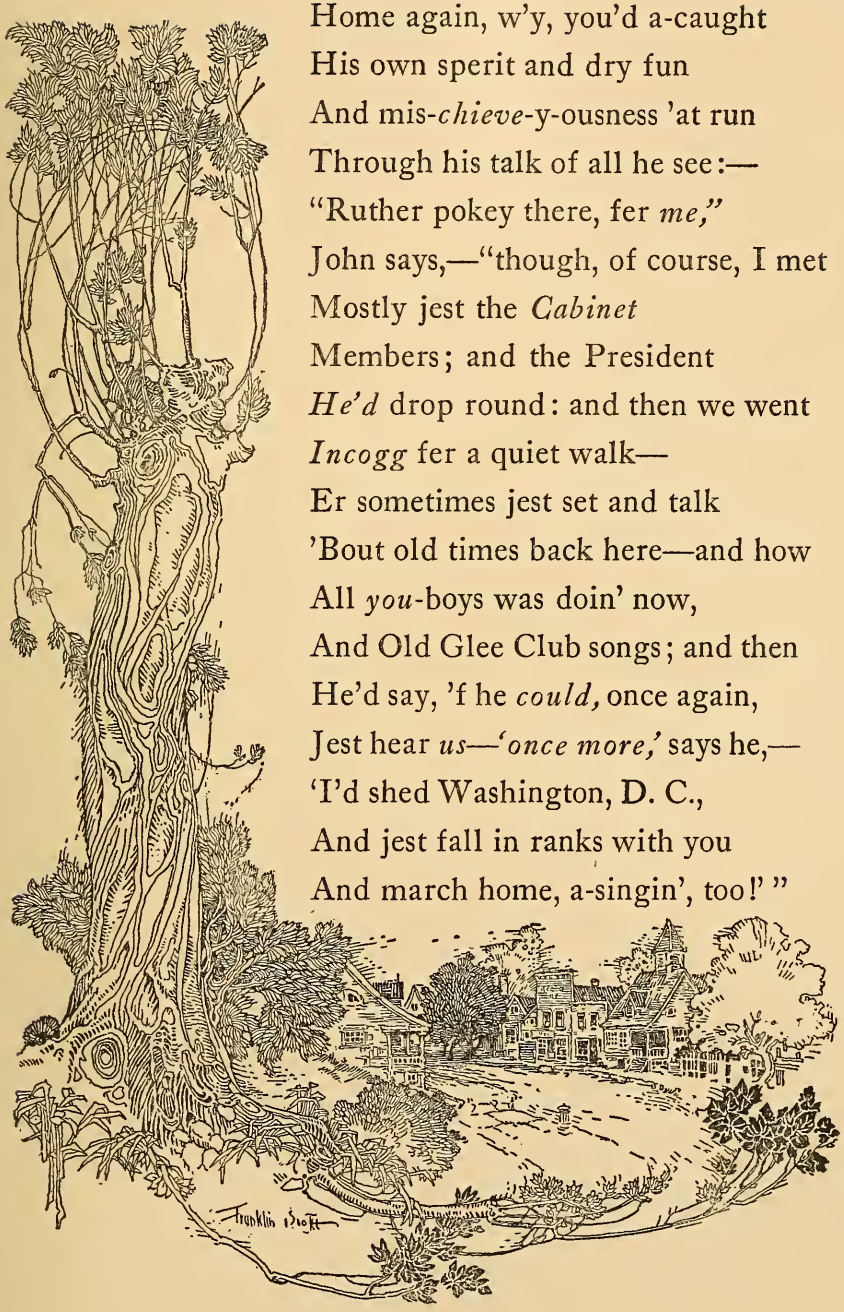
They was jest *boys* then, all young—
And 'bout lively as they sung!
Now they hain't young anymore—
('Less the ones 'at's gone before
'S got their youth back, glad and free
'N' keerless as they used to be!)
Burgess Brown's old friends all 'low
He is 'most as lively now,
And as full o' music, too,
As when Old Glee Club was new!
And *John Blake,* you mind, 'at had
The near-sightedness so bad,
When he sung by note, the rest
Read 'em fer him, er he *guessed*
How they run—and *sung* 'em, too,
Clair and sweet as honey-dew!



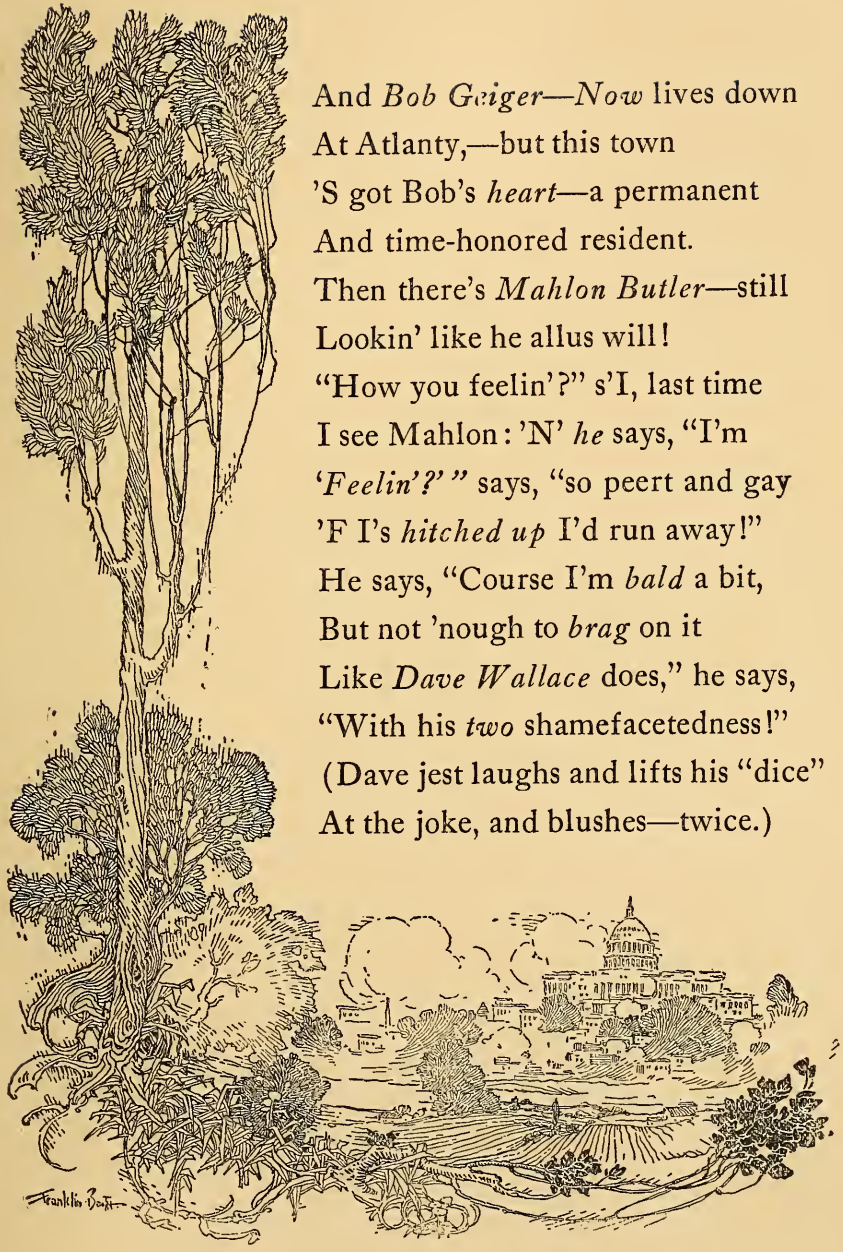
Harry Adams 's here—and he's
Jollyin' ever' man he sees
'At complains o' gittin' gray
Er a-*age*in' anyway.
Harry he jest *thrives* on fun—
"Troubles?" *he* says,—"Nary one!—
Got gran'-childern I can play
And keep young with, night and day!"
Then there's *Ozzy Weaver*—he's
Kickin', lively as you please,—
'N' *Dearie Macy*.—Called 'em then
"The Cherubs." Sung "We are two Men
O' th' Olden Time." Well! their duets
Was jest sweet as violets!



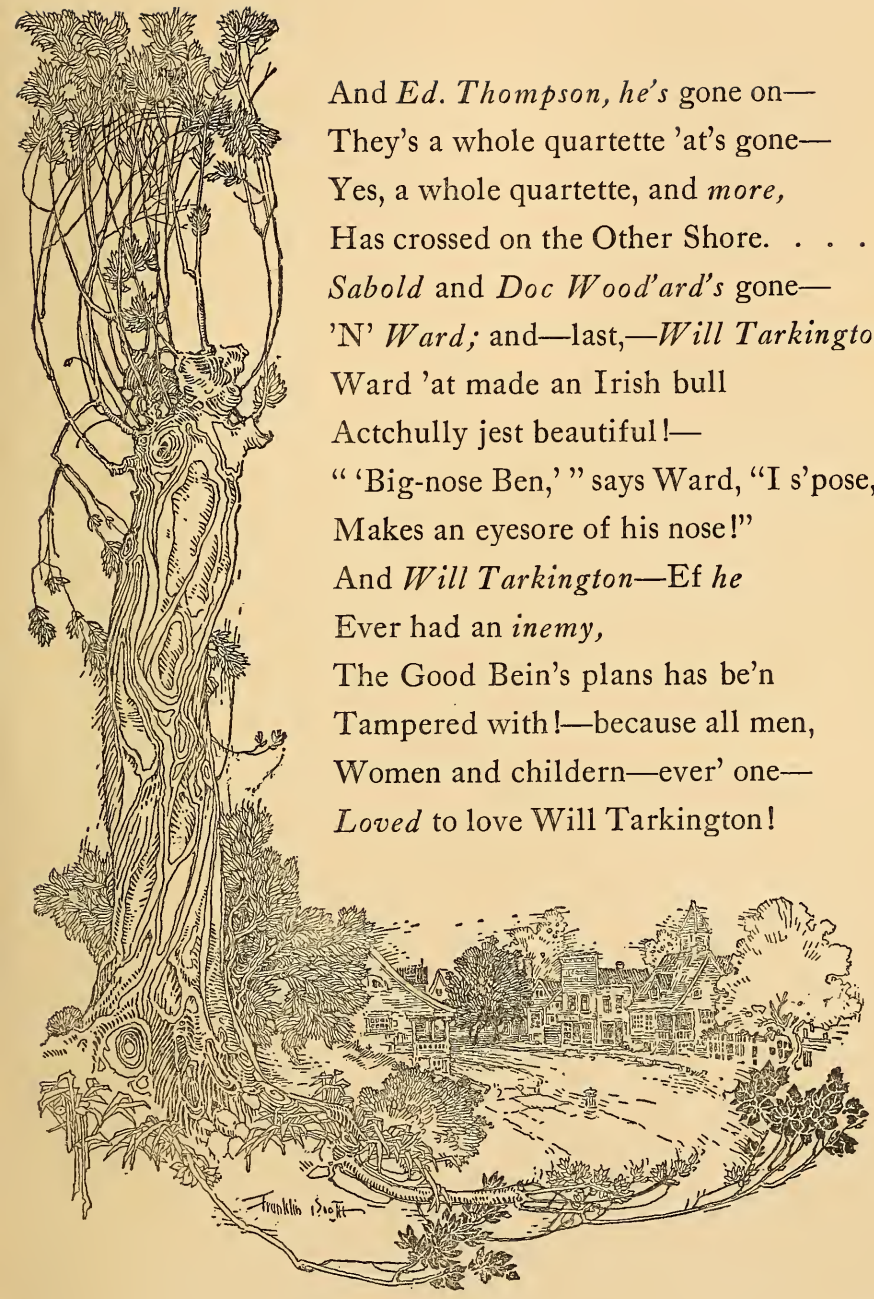
And *Dan Ransdell*—he's still here—
Not jest in the *town,* but near
Enough, you bet, to allus come
Prompt' on time to vote at home!
Dan he's be'n in Washington
Sence he went with Harrison. . . .
And *John Slauson*—(Boys called John
"Sloppy Weather.")—he went on
Once to Washington; and Dan
Intertained him:—Ever' man,
From the President, to all
Other big-guns Dan could haul
In posish 'ud have to shake
Hands with John fer old times' sake.



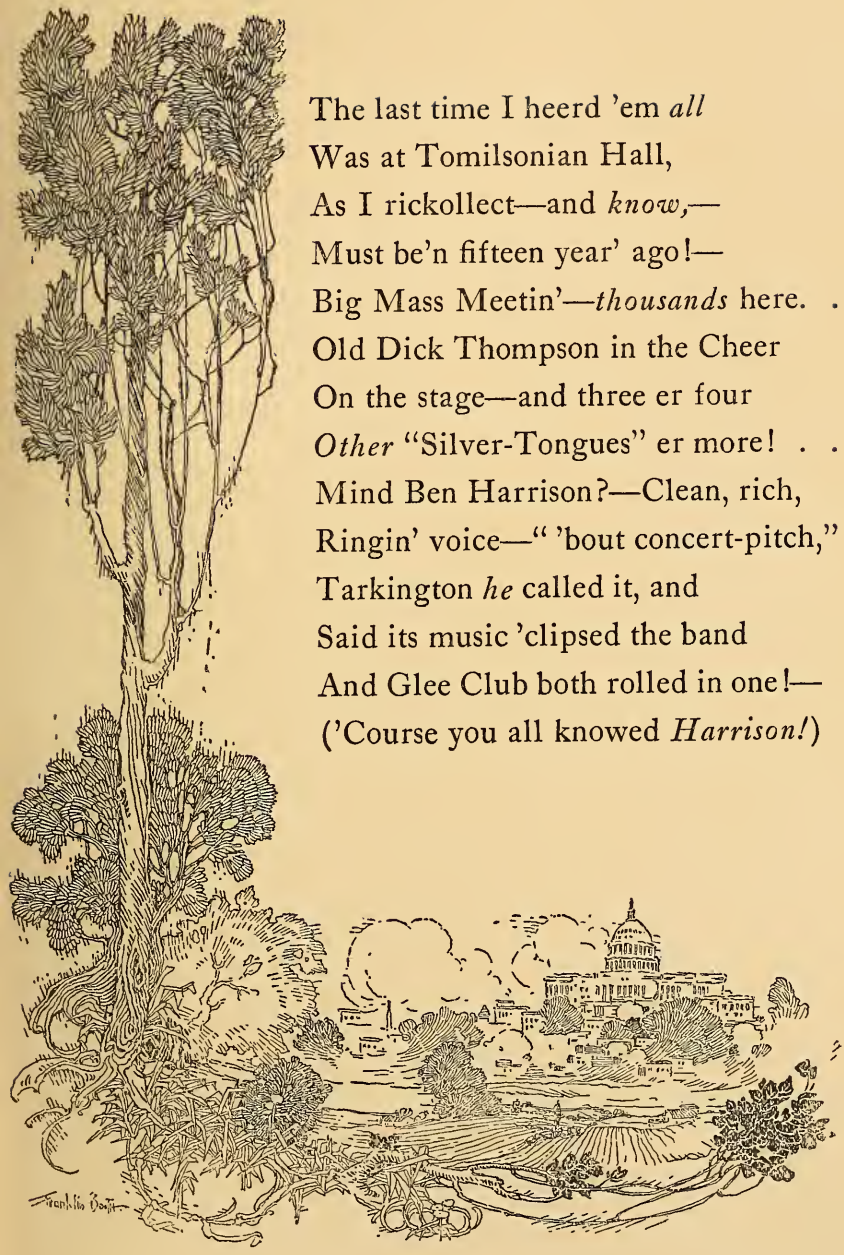
And to hear *John,* when he got
Home again, w'y, you'd a-caught
His own sperit and dry fun
And mis-*chieve*-y-ousness 'at run
Through his talk of all he see:—
"Ruther pokey there, fer *me,*"
John says,—"though, of course, I met
Mostly jest the *Cabinet*
Members; and the President
He'd drop round: and then we went
Incogg fer a quiet walk—
Er sometimes jest set and talk
'Bout old times back here—and how
All *you*-boys was doin' now,
And Old Glee Club songs; and then
He'd say, 'f he *could,* once again,
Jest hear *us—'once more,'* says he,—
'I'd shed Washington, D. C.,
And jest fall in ranks with you
And march home, a-singin', too!' "



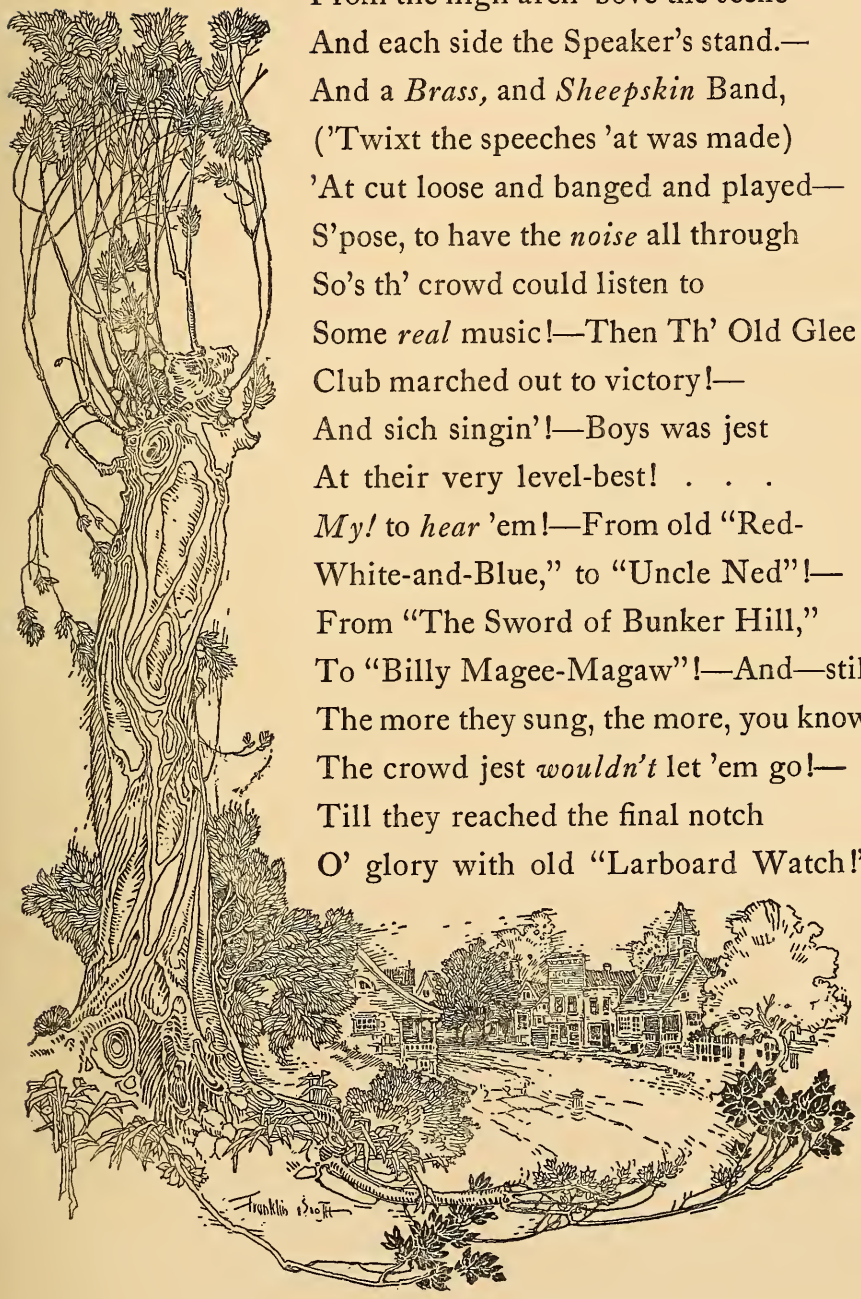
And *Bob Geiger—Now* lives down
At Atlanty,—but this town
'S got Bob's *heart*—a permanent
And time-honored resident.
Then there's *Mahlon Butler*—still
Lookin' like he allus will!
"How you feelin'?" s'I, last time
I see Mahlon: 'N' *he* says, "I'm
'*Feelin'?*'" says, "so peert and gay
'F I's *hitched up* I'd run away!"
He says, "Course I'm *bald* a bit,
But not 'nough to *brag* on it
Like *Dave Wallace* does," he says,
"With his *two* shamefacetedness!"
(Dave jest laughs and lifts his "dice"
At the joke, and blushes—twice.)



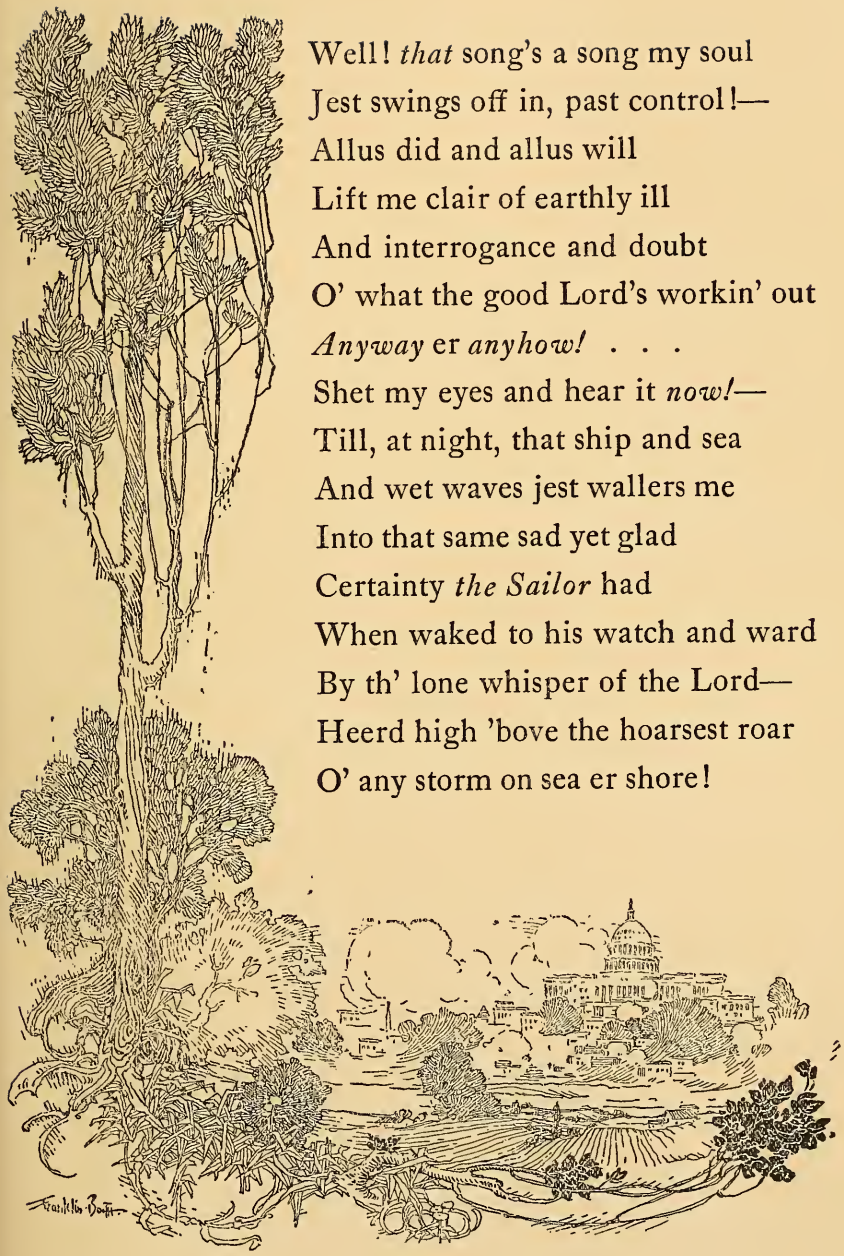
And *Ed. Thompson, he's* gone on—
They's a whole quartette 'at's gone—
Yes, a whole quartette, and *more,*
Has crossed on the Other Shore. . . .
Sabold and *Doc Wood'ard's* gone—
'N' *Ward;* and—last,—*Will Tarkington.*—
Ward 'at made an Irish bull
Actchully jest beautiful!—
" 'Big-nose Ben,' " says Ward, "I s'pose,
Makes an eyesore of his nose!"
And *Will Tarkington*—Ef *he*
Ever had an *inemy,*
The Good Bein's plans has be'n
Tampered with!—because all men,
Women and childern—ever' one—
Loved to love Will Tarkington!



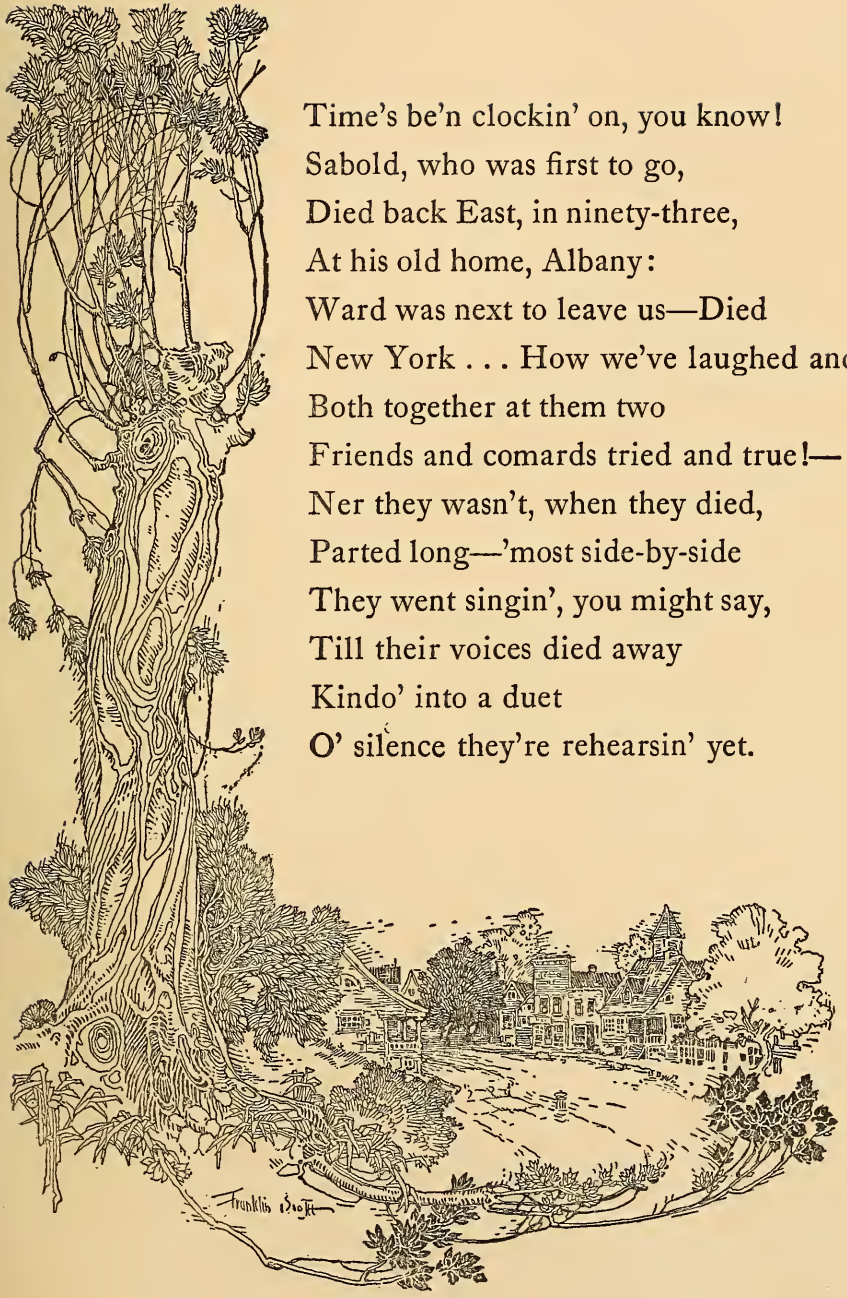
The last time I heerd 'em *all*
Was at Tomilsonian Hall,
As I rickollect—and *know,*—
Must be'n fifteen year' ago!—
Big Mass Meetin'—*thousands* here. . .
Old Dick Thompson in the Cheer
On the stage—and three er four
Other "Silver-Tongues" er more! . . .
Mind Ben Harrison?—Clean, rich,
Ringin' voice—" 'bout concert-pitch,"
Tarkington *he* called it, and
Said its music 'clipsed the band
And Glee Club both rolled in one!—
('Course you all knowed *Harrison!*)



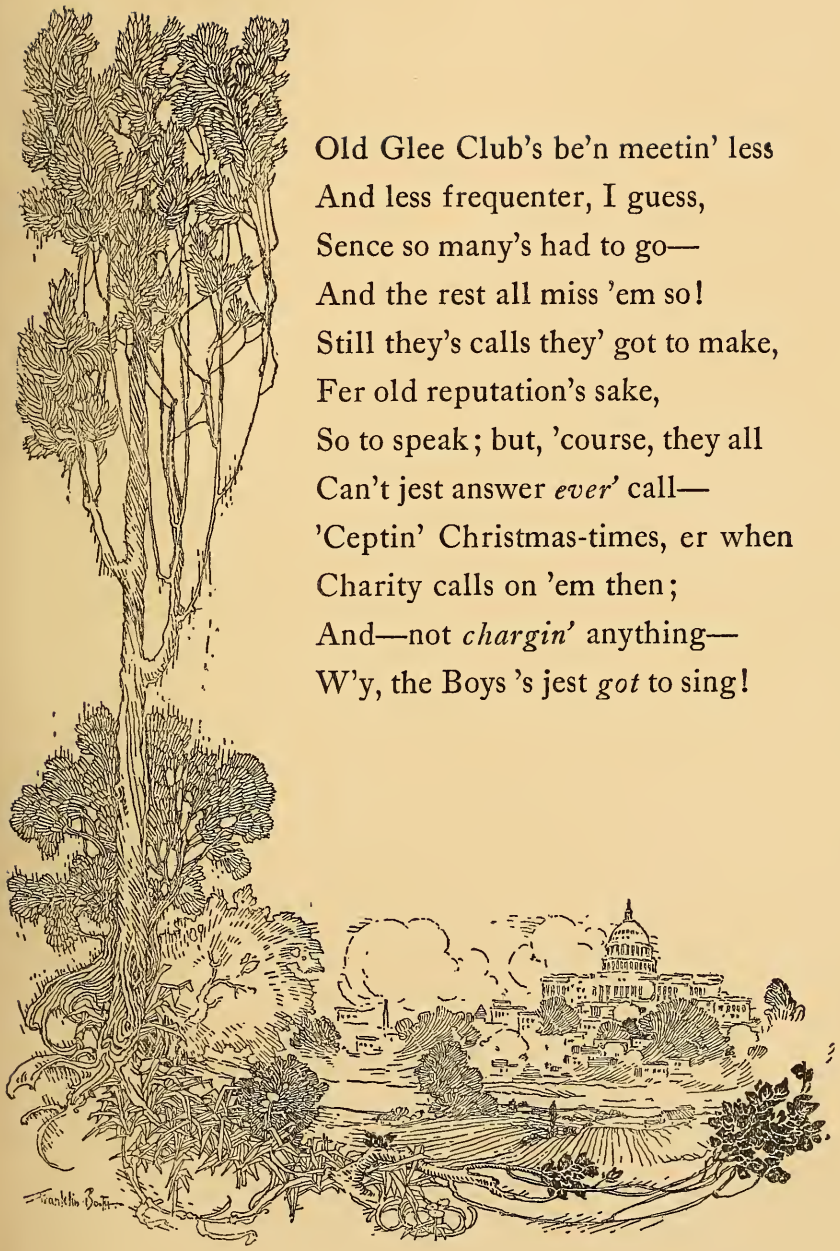
Yes, and Old Flag, streamin' clean
From the high arch 'bove the scene
And each side the Speaker's stand.—
And a *Brass,* and *Sheepskin* Band,
('Twixt the speeches 'at was made)
'At cut loose and banged and played—
S'pose, to have the *noise* all through
So's th' crowd could listen to
Some *real* music!—Then Th' Old Glee
Club marched out to victory!—
And sich singin'!—Boys was jest
At their very level-best! . . .
My! to *hear* 'em!—From old "Red-
White-and-Blue," to "Uncle Ned"!—
From "The Sword of Bunker Hill,"
To "Billy Magee-Magaw"!—And—still
The more they sung, the more, you know,
The crowd jest *wouldn't* let 'em go!—
Till they reached the final notch
O' glory with old "Larboard Watch!"



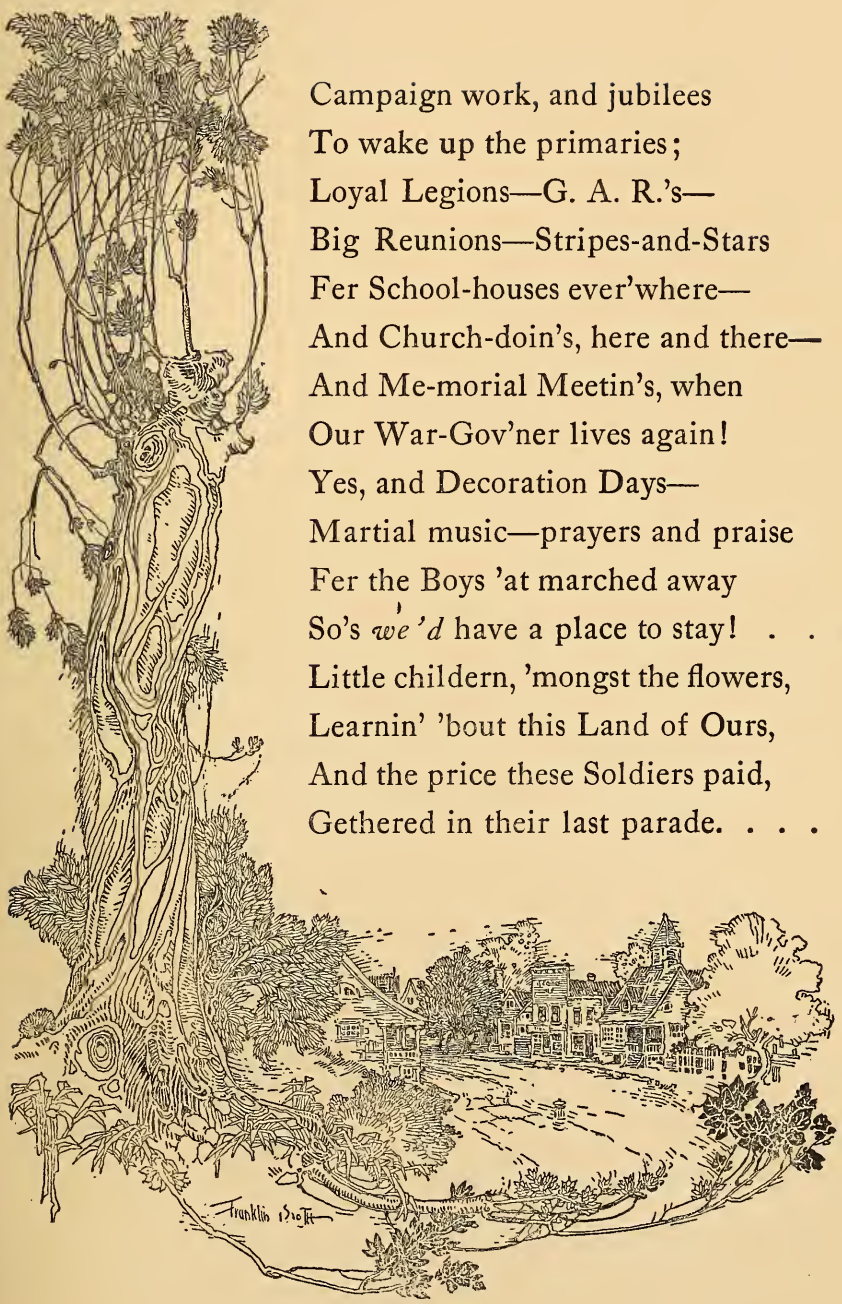
Well! *that* song's a song my soul
Jest swings off in, past control!—
Allus did and allus will
Lift me clair of earthly ill
And interrogance and doubt
O' what the good Lord's workin' out
Anyway er *anyhow!* . . .
Shet my eyes and hear it *now!*—
Till, at night, that ship and sea
And wet waves jest wallers me
Into that same sad yet glad
Certainty *the Sailor* had
When waked to his watch and ward
By th' lone whisper of the Lord—
Heerd high 'bove the hoarsest roar
O' any storm on sea er shore!



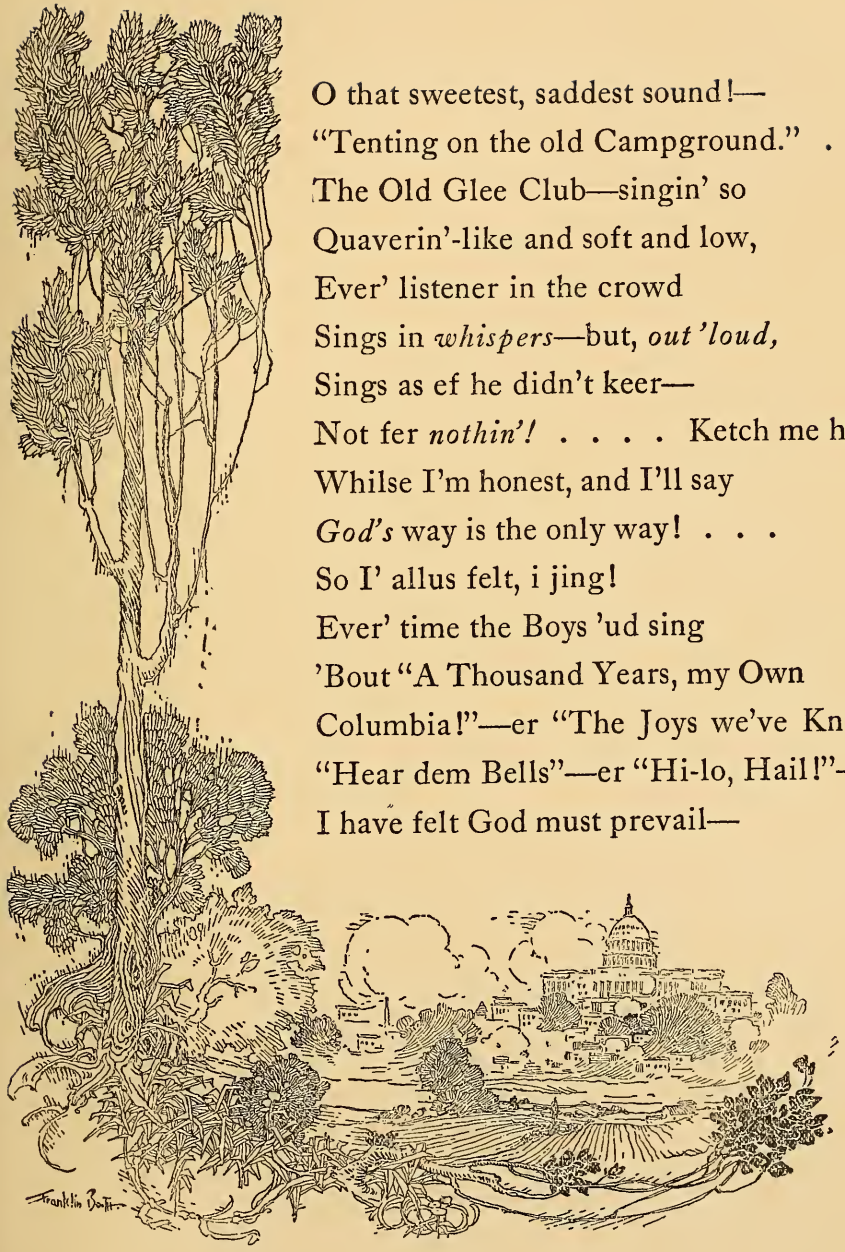
Time's be'n clockin' on, you know!
Sabold, who was first to go,
Died back East, in ninety-three,
At his old home, Albany:
Ward was next to leave us—Died
New York . . . How we've laughed and cried
Both together at them two
Friends and comards tried and true!—
Ner they wasn't, when they died,
Parted long—'most side-by-side
They went singin', you might say,
Till their voices died away
Kindo' into a duet
O' silence they're rehearsin' yet.



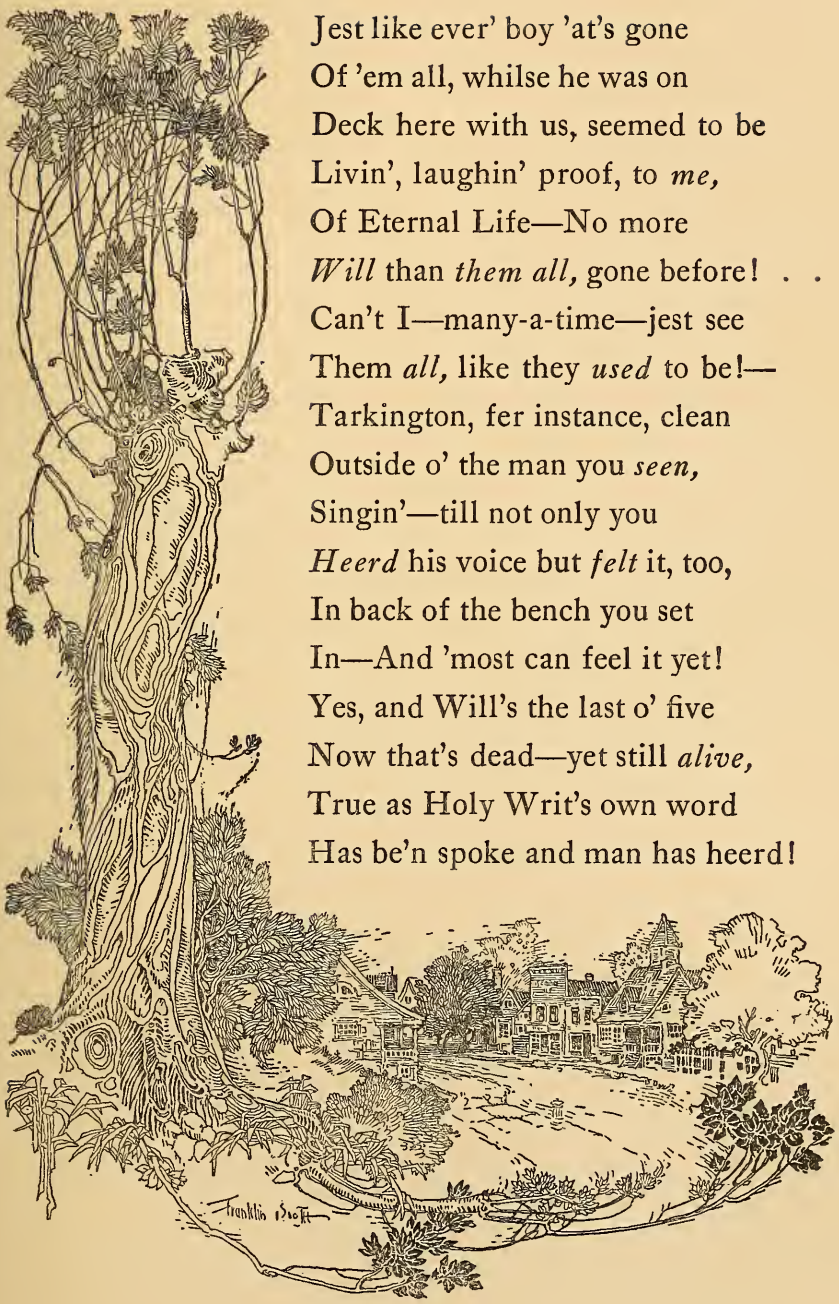
Old Glee Club's be'n meetin' less
And less frequenter, I guess,
Sence so many's had to go—
And the rest all miss 'em so!
Still they's calls they' got to make,
Fer old reputation's sake,
So to speak; but, 'course, they all
Can't jest answer *ever'* call—
'Ceptin' Christmas-times, er when
Charity calls on 'em then;
And—not *chargin'* anything—
W'y, the Boys 's jest *got* to sing!



Campaign work, and jubilees
To wake up the primaries;
Loyal Legions—G. A. R.'s—
Big Reunions—Stripes-and-Stars
Fer School-houses ever'where—
And Church-doin's, here and there—
And Me-morial Meetin's, when
Our War-Gov'ner lives again!
Yes, and Decoration Days—
Martial music—prayers and praise
Fer the Boys 'at marched away
So's *we'd* have a place to stay! . . .
Little childern, 'mongst the flowers,
Learnin' 'bout this Land of Ours,
And the price these Soldiers paid,
Gethered in their last parade. . . .

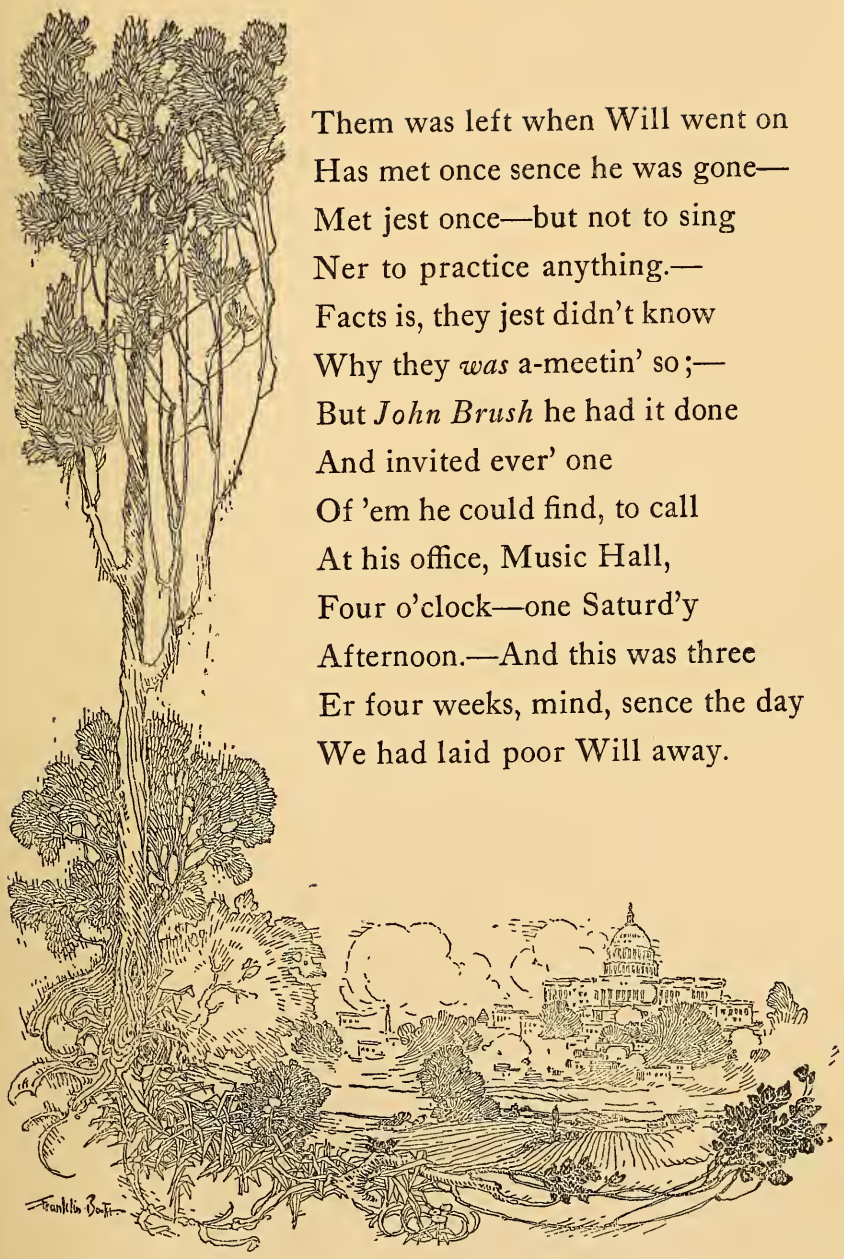


O that sweetest, saddest sound!—
"Tenting on the old Campground." . . .
The Old Glee Club—singin' so
Quaverin'-like and soft and low,
Ever' listener in the crowd
Sings in *whispers*—but, *out 'loud,*
Sings as ef he didn't keer—
Not fer *nothin'!* . . . . Ketch me here
Whilse I'm honest, and I'll say
God's way is the only way! . . .
So I' allus felt, i jing!
Ever' time the Boys 'ud sing
'Bout "A Thousand Years, my Own
Columbia!"—er "The Joys we've Known"—
"Hear dem Bells"—er "Hi-lo, Hail!"—
I have felt God must prevail—

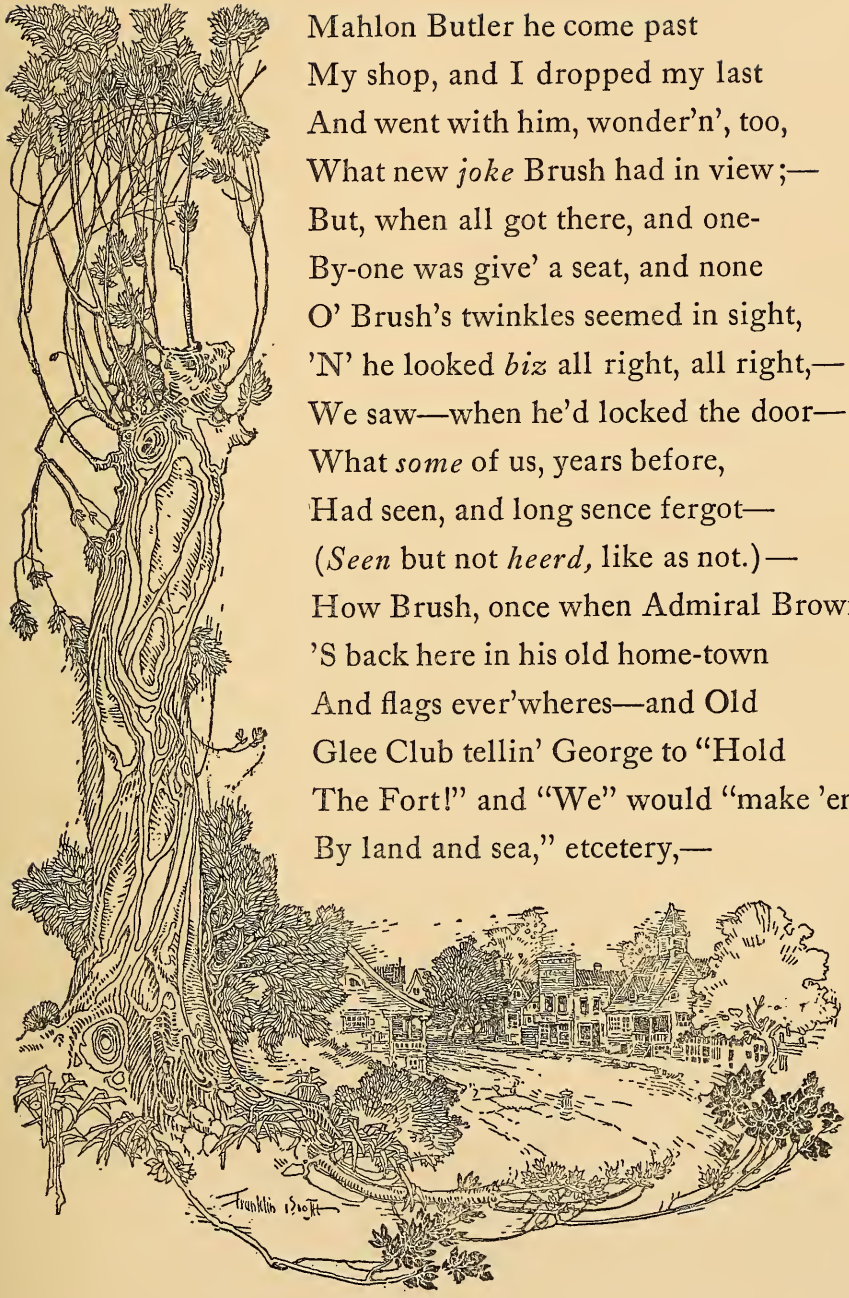


Jest like ever' boy 'at's gone
Of 'em all, whilse he was on
Deck here with us, seemed to be
Livin', laughin' proof, to *me,*
Of Eternal Life—No more
Will than *them all,* gone before! . . .
Can't I—many-a-time—jest see
Them *all,* like they *used* to be!—
Tarkington, fer instance, clean
Outside o' the man you *seen,*
Singin'—till not only you
Heerd his voice but *felt* it, too,
In back of the bench you set
In—And 'most can feel it yet!
Yes, and Will's the last o' five
Now that's dead—yet still *alive,*
True as Holy Writ's own word
Has be'n spoke and man has heerd!

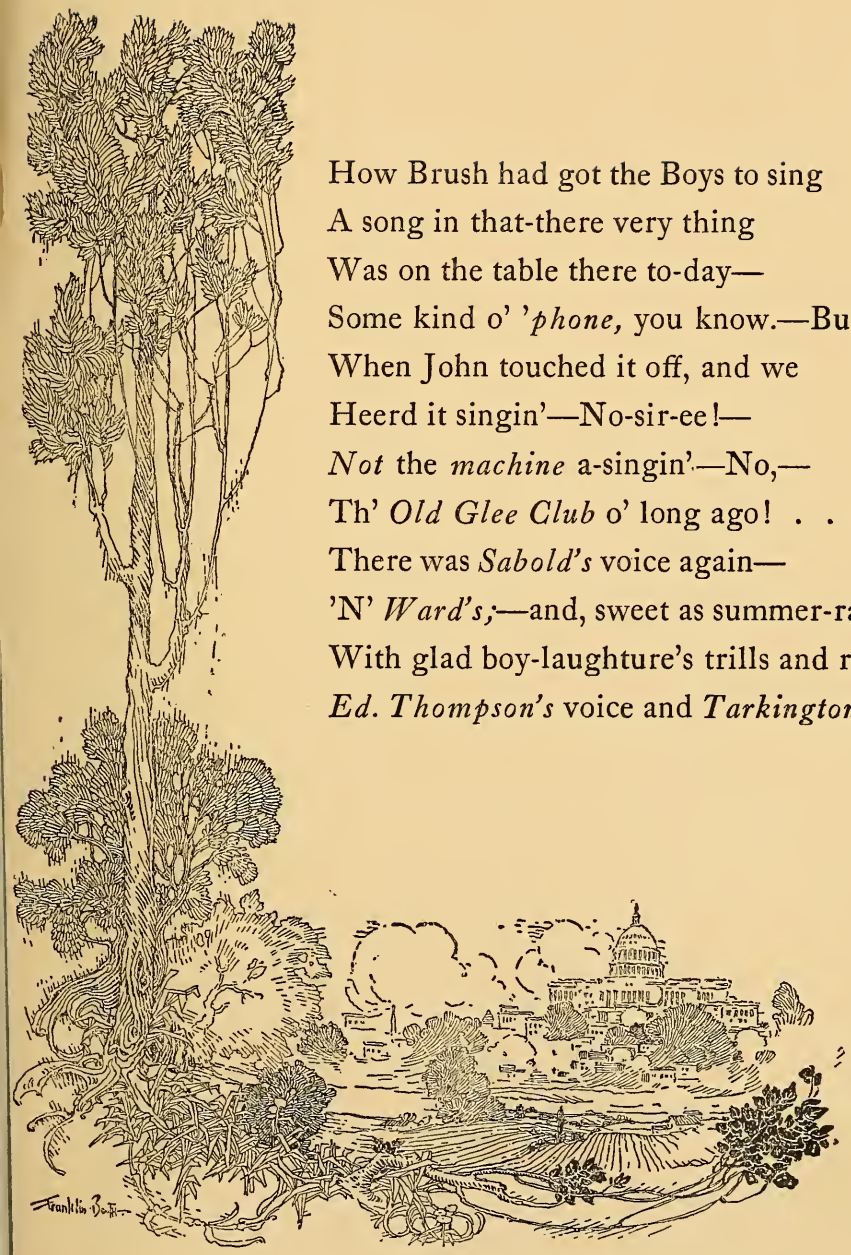
SHINE
SHOP



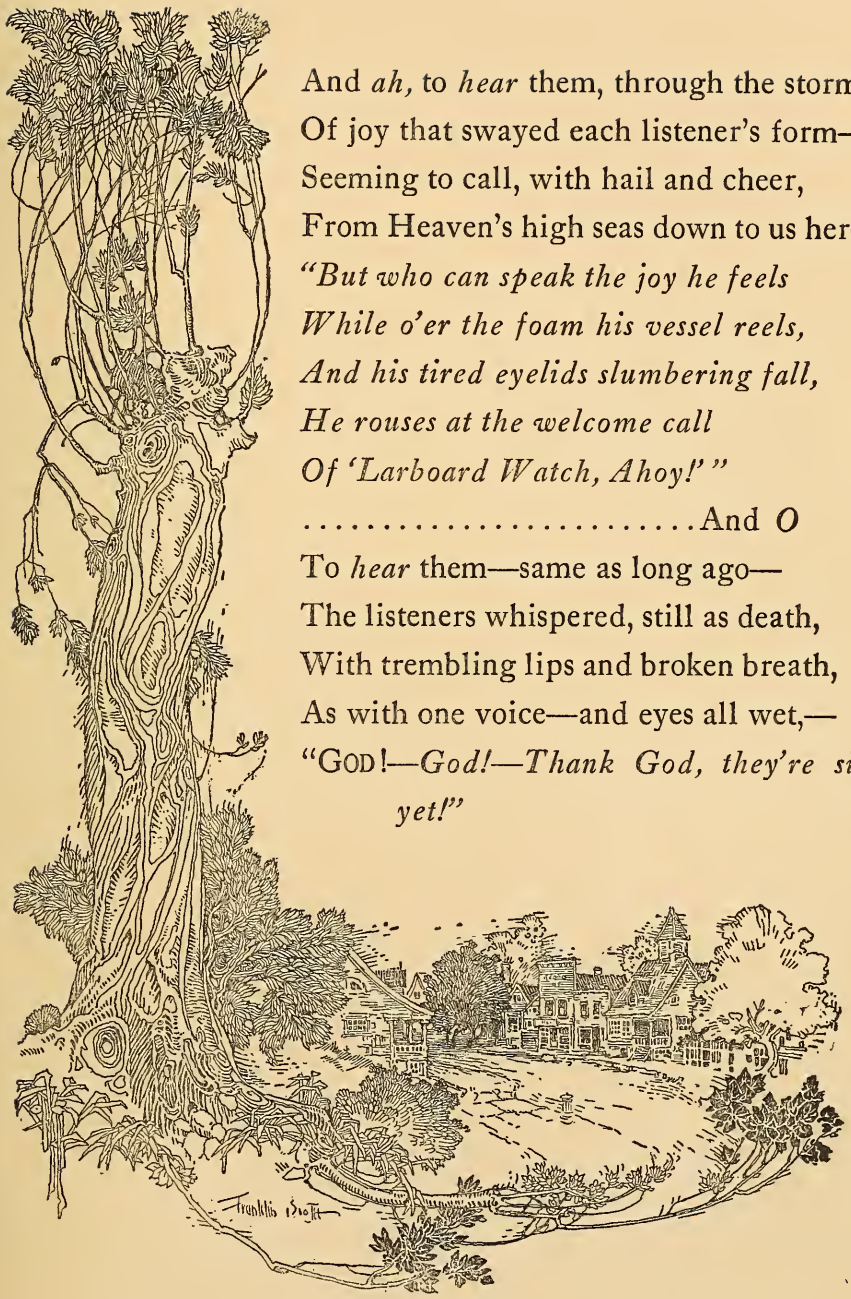
Them was left when Will went on
Has met once sence he was gone—
Met jest once—but not to sing
Ner to practice anything.—
Facts is, they jest didn't know
Why they *was* a-meetin' so;—
But *John Brush* he had it done
And invited ever' one
Of 'em he could find, to call
At his office, Music Hall,
Four o'clock—one Saturd'y
Afternoon.—And this was three
Er four weeks, mind, sence the day
We had laid poor Will away.



Mahlon Butler he come past
My shop, and I dropped my last
And went with him, wonder'n', too,
What new *joke* Brush had in view;—
But, when all got there, and one-
By-one was give' a seat, and none
O' Brush's twinkles seemed in sight,
'N' he looked *biz* all right, all right,—
We saw—when he'd locked the door—
What *some* of us, years before,
Had seen, and long sence fergot—
(*Seen* but not *heerd,* like as not.)—
How Brush, once when Admiral Brown
'S back here in his old home-town
And flags ever'wheres—and Old
Glee Club tellin' George to "Hold
The Fort!" and "We" would "make 'em flee
By land and sea," etcetery,—



How Brush had got the Boys to sing
A song in that-there very thing
Was on the table there to-day—
Some kind o' '*phone,* you know.—But *say!*
When John touched it off, and we
Heerd it singin'—No-sir-ee!—
Not the *machine* a-singin'—No,—
Th' *Old Glee Club* o' long ago! . . .
There was *Sabold's* voice again—
'N' *Ward's,*—and, sweet as summer-rain,
With glad boy-laughture's trills and runs,
Ed. Thompson's voice and *Tarkington's!* . . .



And *ah,* to *hear* them, through the storm
Of joy that swayed each listener's form—
Seeming to call, with hail and cheer,
From Heaven's high seas down to us here:—
"But who can speak the joy he feels
While o'er the foam his vessel reels,
And his tired eyelids slumbering fall,
He rouses at the welcome call
Of 'Larboard Watch, Ahoy!'"
.....And *O*
To *hear* them—same as long ago—
The listeners whispered, still as death,
With trembling lips and broken breath,
As with one voice—and eyes all wet,—
"GOD!—*God!—Thank God, they're singing yet!*"

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